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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS OBSERVATION IN BUNIA

11. Summary: (U) Pol Intern traveled to Bunia (Ituri District) to observe the DRC's July 30 elections. Visits to over ten different voting centers and approximately 100 individual stations revealed no significant evidence of irregularities. Despite sometimes long and cumbersome voting lines, the day was largely notable for its calmness. Though international observers were sparse, Congolese observers and political party witnesses were visible throughout the district. Respecting previously brokered agreements, militias that have been plaguing Ituri for years did not disrupt any of the voting in the region. Encouragingly, the district which has approximately 1.4 million registered voters and had until recently been mired in technical difficulties regarding the elections, especially concerning the persistent IDP problem was able to execute elections effectively with only a minimum of the IDP population being excluded. Initial results based on those polling sites observed indicated that President Joseph Kabila won by a wide margin. End Summary.

Smooth Sailing

12. (U) Beginning at 6 am, Pol Intern traveled in and around the region surrounding Bunia to observe the presidential and legislative elections. More than ten voting centers were visited in the area ranging from the Primary School "Lumumba" near Bunia center to the more remote area of N'Dele and its voting center located in the primary school "Mambesu". Throughout the day, Pol Intern visited more than 100 individual stations and witnessed no voting irregularities. Starting at 6 am, lines of voters waiting outside voting stations were already quite long. Centers generally opened on time, ranging from about 6:10 to 6:45. Though early voting was somewhat slow, as the hours went by centers started to process individual voters in a couple of minutes as opposed to the 10-15 minutes seen at the beginning of operations. By mid-afternoon virtually all stations had no lines, save for the smaller stations that were in more physically confined locations.

13. (U) Pol Intern observed relatively little international observers monitoring the elections, apart from a couple of European Commission members. (Note: MONUC forces from the Moroccan Battalion were present at every station and many civilian members of MONUC-Bunia were seen throughout the day. End Note.) In almost every station, however, there were many national observers from various faith-based organizations, independent national observation organizations as well as political party witnesses. The political parties most commonly represented were the MSR-Ituri, the PPRD, the MLC, and the Forces de Renouveau.

All's Quiet On The Eastern Front

14. (U) In a July 29 meeting, MONUC Head of Mission in Bunia Charles Gomis and Political Affairs Division Chief Nilkanthsing Jagarnath told Pol Intern about the status of the three most troublesome militias still in operation in the District: Mathieu Nagudjolo's MRC, Peter Karim's FNI and Cobra Matata's FRPI (septel). Gomis and Nils were confident that the region was under control, as each militia leader had been met with and had agreed to respect the elections process. In addition, Jagarnath explained that the situation of the nearly 140,000 IDPs, approximately 40,000 were eligible to vote. Located in the Irumu territory of the District, the IDPs are concentrated around the villages of Geti, Komanda, Inchomia and Kagabu. During the July 30 election, no violence was reported from any of these militias or areas, though few, if any, of the IDPs were ultimately able to vote. The only incident of note was a jail break in Bunia reported to Pol Intern by MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahoob. During the apprehension of the escapees, it was learned that the motivation of the break was so that the prisoners could vote. MONUC allowed the convicts to vote before returning them to their cells.

The Incumbent Holds Strong

15. (SBU) At 5 pm, the prescribed closing time, Pol Intern returned to the Lumumba Center to witness counting procedures. Though quite lengthy and laborious due to the number and size of the ballots, the counting went ahead with

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relatively few problems. (Note: Specifically, counting was witnessed in voting station I (of A-J) at the Lumumba Center. In total there were 481 ballots cast. End note.) Illuminated by flashlight, the counting of the presidential ballots was finished at approximately 9:30 pm with incumbent Joseph Kabila garnering 460 votes. The remaining votes were spread among several other candidates, with Azarias Ruberwa (RCD) receiving nine votes, Pierre Pay Pay (CODECO) garnering five and Jean-Pierre Bemba (MLC) getting a total of two votes in the station. The legislative count continued into the early morning hours and was executed with relatively few problems. Subsequent conversations with members of other observation delegations stationed throughout the District revealed results along the same lines, with Kabila normally receiving 80 percent or higher of the preliminary count.

Comment

15. (SBU) In general, July 30 ended the same way that it began--in peace and in an environment that was marked only by people's eagerness to vote. It was reported to Pol Intern by many voters that they had walked for almost an entire day to vote. This kind of enthusiasm speaks volumes of the will of the people to move forward with the democratization process. It is now incumbent upon the politicians to uphold the same levels of dignity vis-a-vis this historic process.
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